

Sleep, bedtime routines and rituals: views of children and parents

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Introduction: Sleep is known to be associated with memory, and deprivation can result in decreased attention, reaction time and concentration (Ward, Rankin & Lee, 2007), yet sleep is taken for granted by most people. Inconsistent sleep duration during development contributes to inattention, hyperactivity and decreased cognitive skills (Touchette et al, 2007). Rest and sleep are essential occupations for all human beings but there is little research on the views of children and their families on sleep as an occupation and the routines and rituals that surround bedtime.

Objectives: The aim of this study was to discover the importance and meaning of bedtime rituals and routines from a child's perspective. Additionally, to explore if there were differences of views among family members regarding the importance of these routines.

Method: A qualitative phenomenological study was conducted, using in-depth interviews with six typically developing children between 7 and 11 years of age, and their parents. Interviews were conducted separately with the children and their parents beginning with an initial question to trigger a 'grand-tour testimony'.

Results: Initial analysis suggests that bedtime rituals are full of symbolic meanings for families. Predictable routines for both children and care takers during bedtime helps establish positive occupational routines easing children into a relaxed state and sleep. Poor sleep habits and sleep deprivation is a form of occupational deprivation. Benefits to both child and caretakers will be discussed.

Conclusion: Routines and rituals vary from home to home however all contain similar themes such as family time, special time and relaxation occupations. Family routines may need to be changed to support rest and sleep occupations, this is not easy to achieve if bedtime is closely linked with symbolic meaning for the family.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy: Understanding the importance of bedtime routines and rituals, even when they are dysfunctional, must be seen from the child's and family's perspective if occupational therapists are to introduce new routines or make changes. Unless established routines are understood changes introduced by therapists are unlikely to be successful as they do not fit with family habits and values.